

**ANDRO*-SUPERIORISM:
ANTI-FEMALE* THOUGHT AND THE SUPERHUMAN
FALLACY IN WESTERN CANONICAL PHILOSOPHY**

<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajct.v4i1.4>

Submission: March 31, 2024 Accepted: June 30, 2024

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Abstract

Most of the existing histories of Western philosophy are to be considered incomplete and even incorrect because of an inherent andro*-superiorist bias. The (epistemic) violence of this exclusion has been irrefutably demonstrated by mostly female* philosophers. This study analyzes the nature of the misogyn*y of the male* philosophers and suggests new concepts to describe this (epistemic) violence more precisely, namely the concept of superiorism and the superhuman fallacy. Superiorism is understood as an inability and/or unwillingness to accept the Other. Superiorism arises when the fallacy is committed, i.e. when a normative difference between human beings is introduced. In the final section, the practice of desuperiorization is outlined. Desuperiorization is to be understood as the philosophical practice allowing us to develop the capability and willingness to accept otherness sui generis. To desuperiorize philosophy means to consciously and practically unwant all privileges which derive from the pseudo-superiority of the male* human being.

Keywords: Misogyny, Superhuman Fallacy, Superiorism, Desuperiorization

Introduction

Most of the existing histories of Western philosophy are to be considered incomplete and even incorrect because of an inherent andro*-superiorist bias (see WAITHE 1989, 132)¹. Female*

¹ This paper focuses on the problem of the exclusion of female* philosophers by male philosophers in Western philosophy. The asterisk is used to indicate the

philosophers were intentionally excluded, and philosophy was and is portrayed as a foremost male* enterprise. This act of utmost epistemic violence has been impressively demonstrated by mostly female philosophers.

There has been, and there will never be, a way to philosophically justify andro*-superiorist exclusion. This exclusion has been and will always be nothing but an act of violence that might, more or less successfully, disguise itself as philosophy. We will show this in our first section, which provides an extensive review of the current philosophical research positions in this area. In the next section we will introduce the concepts of superiorism and the idea of the cycle of superiorism, describing how superiorism and the specific case of andro*-superiorism have become self-reinforcing realities. In the last section, we will, as a countermeasure to superiorism, suggest the practice of desuperiorization.

The Current Situation

“Man wird erst wissen, was die Frauen sind, wenn ihnen nicht mehr vorgeschrieben wird, was sie sein sollen”, wrote Rosa Mayreder in 1905: “One will only know what women are when they are no longer told what they should be” (MAYREDER 1905, 199, translation by the author). This short sentence points directly to one of the most violent and most consistent atrocities in (Western) intellectual history: the defemini*ization of philosophy.

Mary Ellen Waithe noted that the “[a]ccounts of the two millennia history of our discipline [of philosophy] are astonishingly

explicit inclusion of all cis- and transgender male* and female* human beings in our study. Since we are concerned in this study with the specific case of violence of male* human beings against female* human beings, we only use the terms male* and female*. Of course, there is a multiplicity of gender identities that also suffer from exclusion. Western philosophy has also excluded many more beings: non-white human beings, human beings with disabilities, non-human animals, and so on. To be able to develop a more detailed theory of superiorism, it seemed necessary to focus on a very specific type of exclusion first. The theory presented here will be developed in such a way that it should – at some point – be possible to apply it to other kinds of superiorism, be it for instance transphobia, homophobia, ableism, classism or speciesism. The thematic narrowing down to andro*-superiorism is not based on any kind of irreverence for those who suffer from other forms of superiorism. It has methodological reasons, which are in turn due to the limitations of the philosophical capabilities of the author of this paper.

incomplete and incorrect” (ELLEN 1989, 132). The reason for this astonishing incompleteness and incorrectness is as disturbing as it is obvious that “[t]hose accounts typically omit any mention of contributions made to philosophy by women” (ELLEN 1989, 132). Female philosophers “were overlooked ...not randomly but because they were women” (WITT 2020, 24). Marilyn Frye noted that “[w]omen are oppressed, as *women*. Members of certain racial and/or economic groups and classes, both the males and the females, are oppressed as members of those races and/or classes. But men are not oppressed as *men*” (FRYE 1983, 16) We can find an “extraordinary bias against women in the history of philosophy” (REE 2002, 651, see HUTTON 2015, 10sq.).² This bias has affected philosophy, especially in the way philosophy is remembered. We “ought not to place any confidence in encyclopedias, histories, epitome[es], and anthologies that are products of this distortion” (WAITHE 2005, 6, see also O’NEILL 2019, 19sq.). “The received canon”, Sarah Hutton remarked, “is founded on conceptions of philosophy, philosopher, and philosophical significance that are too restrictive to accommodate women” (HUTTON 2015, 10). However, the disregard for women* philosophers goes even further. Women* philosophers have not only been ignored. The “historical canon” (WAITHE 2020, 4) of Western philosophy is filled with overtly male* supremacist views. This “philosophical anti-feminism is linked ...to philosophy’s claim to present itself as a form of knowledge which places its holder in a position of power” (LE DŒUFF 1977, 10). Many of the thinkers still considered to be canonical today have made fiercely anti-female* statements. These are not just occasional rejections of female* human beings, this “cannot be dismissed as minor aberrations of the philosophical imagination” (LLOYD 1984, 108). There is more than just an uneasiness, a misunderstanding, or an irritation, the “vehemence with which generations of scholars have tried to establish the inferiority of women suggests that more is at stake than is usually acknowledged” (THOMPSON 1983, 13). Western philosophy is filled with an almost obsessive contempt toward female* human beings. Indeed, “[o]ur tradition tells us”, as Charlotte Witt and Lisa Shapiro have so aptly pointed out, “either implicitly through images and metaphors, or explicitly in so many words, that philosophy itself,

² For a selection of misogynist sources see, for example, CLACK 1999.

and its norms of reason and objectivity, exclude everything that is feminine or associated with women” (WITT & SHAPIRO 2021, n.p.). Consequently, philosophy is “effectively, but not explicitly, portrayed as an essentially male enterprise” (WAITHE 1989, 132). An ideal philosopher must have certain virtues. Precisely, these virtues have been consistently masculine*ized (see BORDO 1986) throughout the history of philosophy, which ultimately meant that an ideal philosopher, along with everything else he had to be (for instance white and heterosexual), had to be a male* human being. Only the male* human being is blessed with the necessary character prerequisites to properly philosophize. “From Aristotle to Hume, from Plato to Sartre, reason is associated with maleness” (WITT & SHAPIRO 2021, n.p., see also LLOYD 1984, SCHOTT 2007, HAGENGRUBER 2020, SIMMEL 1923, 52). These masculinized philosophical virtues are commonly thought of in strict binary opposition to the *non*-philosophical *non*-virtues of the female* *non*-philosophers and, of course, the “male-female distinction was not understood as a straightforwardly descriptive principle of classification, but as an expression of values” (LLOYD 1984, 103). The “philosophical sexism ...has identified ‘human’ by a masculine model and defined the feminine only in relation to the masculine” (SCHOTT 1998, 4, see also CLACK 1999, 2). In fact, we “often find that philosophical norms like reason and objectivity are defined in contrast to matter, the irrational or whatever a given philosopher associates with women and the feminine” (WITT & SHAPIRO 2021, n.p). Female* philosophers are understood to lack some sort of “epistemic virtue” (BERGES 2015, 385), and rationality is understood “as transcendence of the feminine” (LLOYD 1984, 104). Susan Bordo even asserted that in Cartesian philosophy, “the formerly female earth becomes inert *res extensa*”, “[s]he’ becomes ‘it’ – and ‘it’ can be understood” (BORDO 1986, 452). This understandable she-it-amalgamation could be completely governed by the alleged superior capacity to understand the male* human being’s philosophical intellect and the alleged inability of the female* human being to be rational or to be taken seriously as a rational person. It thus seems that the assumption of “[t]he inherent inferiority of the feminine authorized the masculine to represent it” (JABLONKA 2022, 68). “The (false) universality claimed for distinctively masculine ways of thinking about what a person is, ...and how a mature human should

act distorts our understandings of the regularities of social life and of their underlying determinants” by obliterating the value and voices of women (HARDING 1982, 232). Indeed, “[m]en’s self-realization has depended on the exploitation of women” (JABLONKA 2019, 52), as the patriarchal traditions “fed on female work and love like a vampire” for millennia (GUTZMANN 1983, 42, translation by the author).

Surprisingly, a significant number of female* philosophers were able to philosophize despite the anti-female* bias. Research by (mostly) female* philosophers has shown that female* philosophers could not be silenced and have been a vital part of the history of philosophy. “Thus while it is true that women suffered a history of subjection, there were circumstances in which their revolt against these restrictions was able to become productive” (HAGENGRUBER 2015, 37, see LE DŒUFF 1977, 2). This is one of the most important findings of research on female* philosophers: “feminist philosophy existed before its current flowering” (WALKER 2005, 154). Female* philosophers have managed to become “philosophers despite [...] their femaleness” (LLOYD 1984, 108). This, of course, immediately raises the question of why – and when – the inclusion of women* declined. It seems that “prior to the seventeenth-century women generally were included in, not excluded from, the most comprehensive of reference materials of earlier epochs” (WAITHE 2020, 12, see also O’NEILL 2019, 18).³ It certainly began in the eighteenth century when female* philosophers were purged systematically from philosophy and the histories of philosophy (see HAGENGRUBER 2015, SABOURIN 2019). Following the “‘purification’ of philosophy” (O’NEILL 1998, 34) in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, female* philosophers were eventually “[no longer] included in the standard nineteenth- and twentieth-century histories of European philosophy as significant, original contributors to the discipline’s past” (O’NEILL 1998, 17). Their ideas were ascribed to male* philosophers (see HAGENGRUBER 2015), female* philosophers were accused of only “piggy-backing on development in men’s ideas” (GREEN/BROAD 2006, 230), and their ideas were even plagiarized by male*

³ However, this is not consensus, see BORDO 1986.

philosophers.⁴ The knowledge of a female* origin of an idea and/or a female* influence on an idea was hidden away and forced into oblivion (see SCHOTT 1996). This obscures our perception of the history of development of ideas and their actual genealogy. In fact, there is, as Ruth Hagenruber has proved, a:

[H]itherto hidden genealogy of philosophical topics and arguments which have always belonged to our history. For a long time women's ideas were ignored partly because we relied on histories of philosophy which took no notice of the misevaluated women's ideas[.] Female philosophers have been active from antiquity on and were present as philosophers throughout the centuries. (HAGENGRUBE 2015, 40; see also HUTTON 2015, 13)

The historical-philosophical perspective intentionally defemini*zed philosophy: “The large picture of the philosophical networks of history only pick out the men, but the finer grid shows that women were indeed part of the conversation” (BERGES 2015, 388). They were, however, intentionally silenced. “The exclusion of women was a constitutive decision of a cultural environment” (HAGENGRUBER 2020, 51). This intentional historico-epistemological violence has effectively produced an andro*centric philosophical self-understanding. The female* philosopher degenerated into a non-entity. This has had severe consequences:

The (false) universality claimed for distinctively masculine ways of thinking about what a person is, what a mature human should believe, and how a mature human should act distorts our understandings of the regularities of social life and of their underlying determinants. (HARDING 1982, 232, see also STOPCZYK 1983, 63)

We ought not, as Sarah Hutton explains, to “insert women's philosophy into a narrative originally constructed without them, a narrative which distorted women's contribution, principally by

⁴ On the case of Bertrand Russell and his plagiarism of Emily Elizabeth Constance Jones, see WAITHE & CICERO 1995, 26sq.

excluding them” (HUTTON 2019, 696, see THOMPSON 1983, 14, STOPCZYK 1983, 61). This should not be forgotten “even as we celebrate a new chapter in the history of philosophy which restores the contribution of women, we need to guard against what I call the *new amnesia*” (HUTTON 2019, 695). By *new amnesia*, Hutton means:

[F]orgetting how we got to where we are now: forgetting that women philosophers were ever forgotten, and assuming they were able to pursue philosophy in the same way as we do; forgetting that putting them back in the frame required abandoning old narratives and the old habits of mind that sustained them. (HUTTON 2019, 695)

The “multifaceted set of problems that relate to the general underrepresentation of women in philosophy” (KRISHNAMURTHY 2017, 928), even though they always were and still are so conspicuous, remains today. The new amnesia is an actual and current danger. Certainly, “things have changed over time for women in philosophy. Yet women remain underrepresented in sheer numbers and in their publication rates” (FRIEDMAN 2013, 24). “Philosophy remains a discipline with one of the lowest participation rates of women in all the humanities” (GATENS 2017, 20). “Writings by women are published, cited, discussed, and sometimes influential... Thus, it still makes sense to wonder whether the features of the practice of philosophy as such are covertly (or overtly) inhospitable to women” (FRIEDMAN 2013, 24).⁵ It “remains unusual to see feminist philosophers integrated into [university course or conference] sessions on topics that are not labelled “feminist” or do not have the word *women* in the title” (WALKER 2005, 160, see also MCCALLION 2022). This does not appropriately reflect the diverse philosophical work that female* philosophers have undertaken and are undertaking. It has not been widely understood that even though

⁵ See further DOTSON 2011, WYLIE 2011, DOUGHERTY et al. 2015, SCHWITZGEBEL/JENNINGS 2017, WILHELM ET AL. 2018, and especially the comprehensive study by Hassoun et al. which provides the “first large-scale longitudinal analysis of women authorships in philosophy” (HASSOUN et al. 2022, 681). There are, of course, contrary voices, see, for example, LANDAU 1996 or SESARDIC & DE CLERQ 2014.

female philosophers were certainly urged to think about the hostility towards them (see RULLMANN 1993), the “majority of women philosophers’ writings do not reflect concern with the nature, status and rights of women” (WAITHE 1987, XII). Female* philosophers do not commit to philosophy solely to contemplate themselves. The “range of writings by women philosophers excluded from the history of the discipline, whether by their own peers or by others, is much wider than the prehistory of feminism” (BERGES 2015, 382). This is of immediate importance for the philosophy being produced:

It will become evident that it was not the ‘gendered’ interest of women to rewrite the history of philosophy, but the universal philosophical necessity to criticize a history that was, in many regards, not dedicated to universality, but defended particular interests. The male-streamed history of philosophy must be blamed for disguising its gendered interest behind its universal claims (HAGENGRUBER 2020, 56). Inasmuch as philosophy seeks to explain and make sense of as wide as swath of human experience as possible, the exclusion of people who have diverse experiences is not just of concern to those whose experiences are being excluded. Their exclusion leads to a poverty of understanding within the discipline itself. (HOLTZMAN 2016, 310)

Jennifer Saul has put it pragmatically:

To get the best possible philosophy being done, we need the best philosophers to receive proper encouragement and good jobs, and to be working in environments where they can produce their best work. [...] Until we successfully do something about implicit bias and stereotype threat, this is not happening. The philosophy being produced is likely to be substantially worse than it would be in a fairer environment.” (SAUL 2013, 50)

Sarah Hutton correctly holds that there “is a *prima facie* need for a history of philosophy which is more historical and more inclusive” (HUTTON 2015, 13). We need to understand that it is “inclusion –

not the addition – of women philosophers in the account one gives of the history of Western philosophy” that we need to work on, “if there is a problem, it is an inclusion, not an addition, problem” (WARREN 2009, 11). “If philosophy is not willing to serve the aim of providing this foundational capacity, to rethink, reshape and question its own basis, *it fails its genuine task*” (HAGENGRUBER 2020, 57, see also LLOYD 1984, 107sq.), and working on inclusivity to undo the male* superiorist restrictions will thus be decisive for the meaning of philosophy itself. It is, as Anna Julia Cooper said, the “woman’s strongest vindication for speaking that *the world needs to hear her voice*. It would be subversive of every human interest that the cry of one-half of the human family be stifled” (COOPER 1892, 121, emphasis in original).

Superiorism

Let us call this disruptive force that stifles the ‘cry of one-half of the human family’ superiorism. We suggest understanding the concept of superiorism as a (pathological?) incapability and/or unwillingness to accept otherness *sui generis*, to incorporate the reality of the other into one’s own reality, an incapability, an inability and/or unwillingness to take the other as the other seriously. In this study, the othered other is the female* human being. And since the othering one is the male* human being, we address the superiorism discussed here as andro*-superiorism.

This strange phenomenon of andro*-superiorism, of male* philosophers asserting the superiority of male* philosophers, can be found, as we have seen, throughout the “historical canon” (WAITHE 2020, 4) of Western philosophy – in Aristotle, Tertullian, Thomas of Aquinas, Rene Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Bertrand Russel and so many more. Inevitably connected with this is the implication of the inferiority of female* (resp. all non-male*) philosophers. We can rephrase this as a simple *modus ponens* argument. The first premise, the conditional, reads:

Conditional: If male* human beings are superior, then female* human beings are inferior.

The second premise, the assertion, reads:

Assertion: Male* human beings are superior.

And the inevitable logical conclusion, the consequent of the conditional, reads:

Conclusion: Therefore, female* human beings are inferior.

The logical structure of the *modus ponens* makes it impossible to question the conditional or the conclusion. These logical inevitabilities, however, are fairly irrelevant when it comes to the question of the validity of male* superiority itself. For this question, everything depends on the second premise, i.e. the assertion, or rather the position, that ‘male* human beings are superior’. This is where the burden of proof lies for the male* philosophers. However, this burden of proof has rarely been taken seriously (see ALCOFF & FEDER 2007). Misogyn*ist thought in Western thought is documented for roughly 2600 years (if we take Hesiod as one of the first sources, see *Theogony* 570-612), and yet, as it seems to us, there has not been a single legitimate philosophical argument provided as to why any human being should consider the assertion that ‘male* human beings are superior’ to be true. It must be admitted that misogyn*y is a *historical fact*. There cannot be any doubt about that (just see, for instance, the documents in CLACK 1999). There is a plethora of examples of its historical facticity, for instance, when canonical philosopher Aristotle states that the “woman has [deliberative faculty (τὸ βουλευτικόν)], but without full authority [ἄκυρον]” (*Politics* 1260a12-13), and that “the male is by nature better fitted to command than the female [τό τε γὰρ ἄρρεν φύσει τοῦ θήλεος ἡγεμονικώτερον] (except in some cases where their union has been formed contrary to nature)” (*Politics* 1259b1-2).

It is, with all hermeneutical generosity, difficult to identify a philosophical argument here (and in the philosophical context within the *Politics*). This is rather a description of the situation of female* human beings who were previously *forced to be* in this very situation. Aristotle does *not* describe how it is by nature (φύσει), how it necessarily has to be, *but* how it is because of the *antecedent suppression of female* human beings* (see HAGENGRUBER 2020). However, this consequence is presented as the *status naturalis*. It is rather obvious that the rejection of women preceded the philosophical

argumentation. Mary Wollstonecraft was absolutely right when she wrote:

From the tyranny of man, I firmly believe, the greater number of female follies proceed; and the cunning, which I allow makes at present a part of their character, I likewise have *repeatedly* endeavoured to prove, is produced by oppression (WOLLSTONECRAFT 1792, 225).

Following Wollstonecraft, we can assume that the philosophers of the historical canon generally began philosophizing after the normative verdict was passed on the female* human being. *Misogyn*y is posited*, it is a quasi-axiom. Philosophers of the historical canon *pretended* and *continue to pretend* that female* inferiority is self-evident.

We suggest here that the process that leads to the position of misogyn*y can be called the *cycle of superiorism*. The cycle of superiorism allows a description of how superiorism and the specific case of andro*-superiorism become a self-reinforcing (pseudo-) reality.

The Cycle of Superiorism

The Observation of Difference

The cycle of superiorism begins with an observation. A *difference* is observed: a difference between the observer and something observed or between two observed entities. This observation might be one of an actual or just an alleged difference. Here it is only of importance that our observing philosopher assumes that his finding is a factual observation of reality. The observer did not find something about which one can argue, the difference found is rather to be considered undeniable truth, the experience of the observation of the difference can simply not be untrue.

The Normative Interpretation of Difference

The difference observed shows some humans *being* like this and some other humans *being* like that. At the same time, however, these observations are *also* observations about some humans being like this and *thus being superior* and about some other humans being like that and *thus being inferior*. This difference between the one and the other human being is presented to the philosophical audience as a *factum*

brutum, a self-evident reality that needs no further explanation. We can think of Aristotle again: “the male is by nature better fitted to command than the female” (*Politics* 1259b1).

Our observing philosopher does not claim to have *arbitrarily posited* the one human being as superior. The one human being’s superiority and the other human being’s inferiority are presented as self-evident. The philosopher is *observing*, Aristotle is *seeing* a normative-ontological division of humanity, and he assumes that we, the audience, will now see this difference too.

We are all, given the ineluctable evidence of the matter, *necessitated* into accepting the factual reality of superior and inferior humans, of superhumans and subhumans. And suddenly the superhuman is no longer the excess of andro*-superiorist fantasy, but just a matter of fact. It is no surprise that our philosopher – here Aristotle – will find his place amongst the superior human beings. The superiority he reclaims for himself and for those who are like him is presented as the unavoidable result of a level-headed observation of reality.

It is important to emphasize again that we are never provided with a philosophical explanation for the normative interpretation. It remains to be found out how it was and is possible that so many western canonical philosophers understand and/or present the *observation of an empirical difference* between two human beings as an *observation of a normative difference*. Is this done intentionally? Is this done consciously? We need to ask: *how is the superhuman fallacy possible?* The superhuman fallacy happens precisely in the moment when a philosophy introduces a normative difference between human beings, precisely in the moment when *the one human being* becomes the (sole) normative point of reference for *the other human being*. The superhuman fallacy happens when a human being – arbitrarily – superhumanizes themselves and – arbitrarily – subhumanizes all those who are not (enough) like themselves. The superhuman fallacy is a fallacy because it – arbitrarily – connects the phenomenon of beings being different to these beings being of different value.

Our philosophical observer will either self-identify with this superior entity – in this case, the observed difference is one between them and someone or something else – or connect with the superior entity – in this case, the observed difference is one between entities that do not include the observer. Think again of Aristotle: he is a

“male” human being – and thus, whether he likes it or not, is “better fitted to command than the female”.

The philosophical observer is narcissistically echoing the initial normative interpretation. The observer is metamorphosing and *becoming* superior by ‘observing’ actually *having been* superior in the first place – or by finding that one was and continues to be closer than something or someone else to that which is superior, which also superiorizes oneself. The initial observation, the normative interpretation, and its narcissistic echo will sooner or later coincide with each other. The observer does not find a reality that is then to be interpreted normatively. What is actually found – at least this is assumed – is normativity observable as a factual reality and, to be more precise, it is – most conveniently – found as a factual reality. Aristotle observed, Aristotle ‘*saw*’ his very own superiority. This coincidence of observation, interpretation, and its narcissistic echo is not necessarily one that was made personally, but it is absorbed by the observer either as first or second-hand factual reality.

It is important to emphasize, that there is – per se – *no philosophical justification* for the normative interpretation. The legitimization for this normativity rests purely on the (alleged) observability and the *creatio ex nihilo* of normativity (see SIMMEL 1923, 53). Our observer seems to assume that those who are willing to see will see that the *factum brutum* naturally inheres to normativity. It is, according to the observer, not the observer who introduced the normativity, it is the *factum brutum* of his superiority (or his closeness to that which is superior) that can be observed and which is, because of its observability and its alleged empirical foundation, in no further need of additional evidence for its truth.

The triad of metamorphosis, coincidence, and *creatio ex nihilo* brings forth the putative empirical fact of one’s very own superiority and, at the same time, the other’s inferiority. It produces the ‘Other’ as an inferior entity within reality.

The Deduction of the Entitlement of Domination

From the putative empirical truth of superiority, our observer infers a practical entitlement. Superiority means, in practical terms, nothing but domination and suppression. Finding oneself superior means in practical terms to find oneself entitled, even necessitated, to dominate the inferior other. (Often enough the superior one seems to be unable

to leave the inferior other alone. The inferior other seems to urge the superior one to react to the outrageous fact of inferiority.)

This – alleged – necessity to dominate can be practiced in many different ways and, of course, it can be used against many different allegedly inferior others – not only against female* human beings. Most other traits of the dominated other are devalued or even completely lost in the process of superiorist domination. Only the superiorist him-/her-themselves can – according to his/her/their self-understanding, because the superiorist is *not like the (inferior) other* – develop a vital and rich personhood.

Practice and Reinforcement

Every practice of domination, be it one of brutal violence or one of tacit (micro-)aggression – such as domination through enforced ignorance or gaslighting – will reinforce the understanding of the superior one as the superior one and the inferior other as the inferior other. From the observation of inferiority – which was, as we have established, actually a posited arbitrary inferiority – righteous entitlement was inferred not only to continue to remain in the pseudo-natural state of superiority, but to actively dominate those who and/or that which is inferior, and thus practically to create and reinforce the superiority of the one and *mutatis mutandis* the inferiority of the other. The reinforcing practices of domination will lead – again – to the observation of difference. The other is – even though the other was an arbitrary *creatio ex nihilo* in the beginning – now an established entity in the ontology of the allegedly superior. The cycle of superiorism can and will begin anew – although, as we must add, the circle is now more predetermined to reproduce its initial assumption.

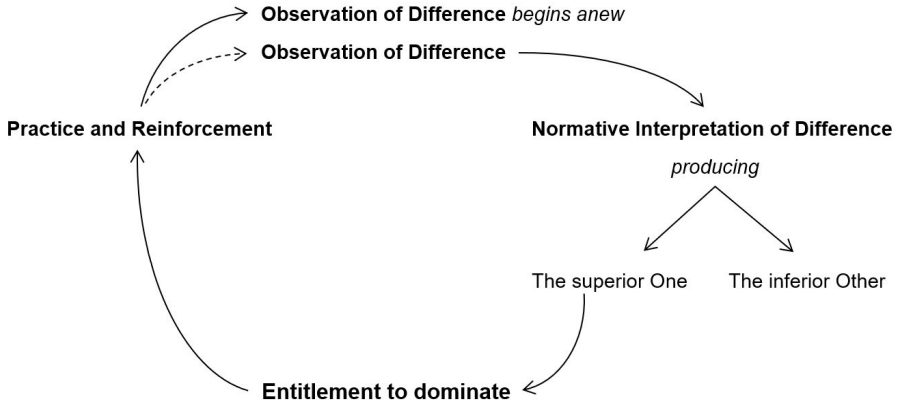


Fig. 1. The Cycle of Superiorism

We can now determine superiorism more precisely: superiorism is the conviction of one's own normative superiority as an observable factual reality that entitles – without any further moral self-doubt – to dominate and suppress those who are not like oneself. The created Others are not embraced by the moral standards of the non-Others. The Others can be treated – without producing a contradiction – using divergent moral rules. Superiorism is an inability and/or unwillingness to accept the Other, to incorporate the Other into reality, to take the Other seriously.

Traditions of Superiorism

The inferiority of female* human beings is only evident because the cycle of superiorism created a reality in which the inferiority can be pseudo-observed as if it were self-evident. We must thus conclude that andro*-superiorist philosophy does *not* exist because male* human beings are factually superior to the philosophical endeavours of any other gender. Something being a historical fact only indicates that this something was a *possible reality* and became a factual reality. This, by no means, implies that this possible reality *necessarily had to become a factual reality*. There is no reason to believe that human beings were necessitated in making andro*-superiorism a factual reality. Andro*-superiorism is *not* inevitable, andro*-superiorism is *not* a necessitated destiny, it is *not* the *conditio humana*, and it is *not* the *status naturalis* of the human being. Even though many Western philosophers have attempted to tell the story of philosophy like this,

the exact opposite is in fact the case. Andro*-superiorism exists simply:

- (a) because it is *possible*,
- (b) because – certain – human beings made this possible reality a factual reality through their *will* and through their *actions*, and
- (c) because – certain – human beings *continue* to do so – whether they are conscious of this or not.

Violence

The factual reality of andro*-superiorism is a phenomenon not necessarily connected with philosophy and not necessarily with the nature of the human being. Female* human beings were violently excluded from the human endeavour of philosophy – because of nothing other than the *will* and the actions of certain philosophers, because of nothing other than certain philosophers *violently willing them out of the human endeavor of philosophy* (see a similar idea developed for colonialism in FRETER & FRETER 2021, 128). Andro*-superiorism is indeed necessarily violent, as John Stuart Mill has pointed out, the “inequality of rights between men and women has no other source than the law of the strongest” (MILL 1869, 124).

Violence is the activity that breaks or wants to break the *formation of will* and/or the *practice of will*. The violence that can be found here has yet to be determined more precisely. There is still a lot that seems rather incomprehensible. The questions, for instance, have not been sufficiently answered:

What are the consequences of this violence? What is the damage that this violence has done and does to female philosophers, to male* philosophers, and to all other philosophers?*

Of course, there is a great body of research on these questions – especially concerning the damaging effects that this way to philosophize has had and continues to have on female* philosophers – but it seems that we do not have an answer to the overarching question:

What happens to philosophy itself when it is historically and ideologically rooted in violence? Can we philosophize non-violently at all when we are situated within the Western historical canon?

And furthermore, we need to understand what motivated this violence:

What motivates a person to engage in anti-female violence – be it as an explicit advocate or as a silent accomplice?

Whatever has motivated the hearts and minds of the anti-female* philosophers, their wills and actions were *not*, were *never* motivated by philosophical arguments. Still, their thoughts had and continue to have a massive impact on philosophers and philosophy itself. Certain human beings consider their opinions to be more relevant than those of other human beings – not for philosophical reasons, but out of interests that can never be justified philosophically. And this has a very unsettling implication: the exclusion of certain human beings was an act of *arbitrary violence*. This violence is *necessarily arbitrary*, it only depends on whether the consequence suits the violator or not. The continuation and the eventual philosophical “historical canon” (WAITHE 2020, 4) that emerged, or rather, that was created (see O’NEILL 1998, HAGENGRUBER 2015, SABOURIN 2019), perpetuated this arbitrary violence. Andro*-superiorist violence was one of the shaping factors of Western philosophy as we know it today. Certain human beings were excluded because they were not like other human beings, because they lacked male*ness. We urgently have to re-evaluate our understanding of the history of Western philosophy as a history of arbitrary, exclusionary, will-breaking violence.

The rhetoric of Western philosophy – intentionally or not – produces an understanding that this philosophy is inviting and addressing all human beings. However, this is – for many philosophers – simply not the case. We need to find out why the misogyn*ists of the western historical canon speak – outside of their explicit misogyn*ist remarks – overall in an inclusivist language. Despite their claims, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas, Hume, or Rousseau do not speak to all of us human beings, they only speak as a philosophical elite to a philosophical elite. They speak only to those who are sufficiently like themselves, and this means to those who do

not lack male*ness. Hume, Voltaire, or Rousseau do not speak to *the* human being. Kant's *Geist des Menschen* or Fichte's *Endzweck der Vernunft* are not inclusive terms, they are radically exclusivist. Based on what has been established so far, it is hardly surprising that this simultaneity of inclusion and exclusion has not been perceived as cognitive dissonance by the misogynistic philosophers and most of their readers. The "activity", to use the words of Leon Festinger, "oriented toward dissonance reduction" (FESTINGER 1985, 3) is precisely this: the division of human beings into the relevant ones and irrelevant others. This consonance-creating practice has, by all appearances, endured for thousands of years. Certainly, it "would be a gross exaggeration to suggest that all the key texts of Western philosophy are misogynistic" (CLACK 1999, 1). However, from the early days of Western philosophy until today, misogyn*y is so present that it can be identified as one of its defining conditions, and one of its *driving forces*. This disturbing driving force of misogyn*y has rarely (if at all) been criticized amongst those who became canonical in Western philosophy.

Anti-philosophical anti-female andro*-superiorist violence has rarely (if at all) been acknowledged as a problem (often not even as a relevant phenomenon) that could affect the philosophical quality of a philosophical approach – of course, with the exception of the critique brought forth by feminist philosophers. The Aristotelian ideas of friendship or the Kantian ideas of peace have rarely been questioned regarding their radical arbitrary, exclusionist, and violent andro*-superiorism – again, of course, with the exception of critique by feminist philosophers. This is still the situation today. Russell's memory has hardly been marred by his view that it cannot "be denied that women are on the average stupider than men" (1930, 83, see HARRISON 1984). John Rawls or Jürgen Habermas, for instance, have left out female* human beings completely from their great politico-philosophical visions without this producing any critique – again with the exception of critique by feminist philosophers (for a more recent case see ZWEIFLER 2013). Andro*-Superiorist violence is often still understood to be *a problem only for this one specific branch of philosophy, i.e. femini*st philosophy*. It is not understood as a problem for all philosophers, *but only for those who have developed a special sensitivity to such problems. i. e. female* philosophers*. The absurdity of this brazen shifting of the problem is obvious. It is up to

those who suffer from violence to find a way to come to peace with it. This audacity has shifted the burden of proof: the problem of andro*-superiorist violence is a *problem* for female* human beings and a *natural fact* for male* human beings, it is a problem for those who are unable and/or unwilling to simply accept reality as it is, it is a mere natural fact to those who are able and/or willing to accept reality as it is. Those capable human beings could ask: *who would make someone responsible for a natural fact?*

Let us emphasize again: the rejection of women* precedes any philosophical argumentation. It is an unacknowledged premise of many philosophical ideas of the West. Marie de Gournay (in *Égalité des Hommes et des Femmes*, 1622) and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (in *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminae sexus*, 1509) have impressively demonstrated the anti-philosophical absurdity of andro*-superiorism. Applying the skeptical idea of ἰσοσθένεια (*isostheneia* – equal strength), they show the futility of all attempts to exclude women in this way: since there are only invented reasons for subjugating a woman* and no actual philosophical arguments, we can simply, for any of these invented reasons, invent an equally powerful counter-reason.

The Continued Existence of Andro*-Superiorism

The exclusion of female* philosophers was never about philosophy, it was never about female* human beings being philosophers, it was always only about these human beings not being male*. There is simply “no justification [...] for the wholesale exclusion of women philosophers from the history of our discipline” (O’NEILL 1988, 390). This practice of exclusion has not yet come to an end. This is still the factual reality. If we still find the exclusion of female* human beings in philosophy, then this is due to the fact that some philosophers:

- a) either continue to refuse to give up the conviction of andro*-superiorism,
- b) or that the conviction of andro*-superiorism is not understood as a conviction but as a reality *sui generis*.

The exclusion of female* philosophers is philosophically unjustifiable. It is an anti-philosophical exclusionary practice and it is detrimental to philosophy in itself. Philosophizing from an andro*-superiorist standpoint means conducting philosophy under unreal

conditions, as if in a laboratory where the non-male* has been artificially eliminated, where the non-male* is not heard and not addressed. This brings us to a set of extremely important questions – to which, as it seems to us, there is so far no answer:

What human being is speaking when philosophy is conducted andro-superioristically? Who is this autonomously superhumanized human being? And to whom is this human speaking? Who is this heteronomously subhumanized Other? About what is the andro*-superiorist speaking? And with what relevance?*

In the factual reality of female* human beings, these laboratory conditions mean nothing other than life under violence. The andro*-superiorist threads of Western philosophy have to be understood, we need to repeat this, as a fundamentally violent undertaking – at least since the 18th century. Andro*-superiorist philosophy is *biacratically* – derived from *βία*, here: *the act of violence*, and *κράτος*, here: *dominion*) organized. We can summarize: Andro*-superiorist philosophy exists because (male*) philosophers were and are willing to exert violence – be it *intentional violence* (e.g. by disregarding female* contributions), or *unintentional violence* (e.g. by not knowing that those female* philosophers are disregarded). Andro*-superiorism comes from and ends in biacracy, and it is defended biacratically.

The First Myth: Zeitgeist

One defense of andro*-superiorism often comes in the form of the *Myth of the Zeitgeist* (see FRETER 2024). This myth goes something like this: ‘Andro*-superiorism is unsurprising, it is to be expected in the thought and philosophical self-understanding of a particular time. Philosophers cannot be held accountable, since they were just the children of their time.’

However, if *Zeitgeist* is powerful enough renders certain philosophers unable to think in a non-andro*-superiorist way, it certainly is not powerful enough to force all philosophers to think in a specific way. How would a change into a non-andro*-superiorist direction ever be possible? And: would the *Zeitgeist* not continuously prevent this change? This does not seem to be the case. And if this is

indeed not the case, it would certainly be reasonable to criticize the andro*-superiorist philosophers, because:

- (a) these philosophers were either *unable* to do so *for personal reasons* or
- (b) they *did not want to do* so *for personal reasons*.

It could be admitted that the Zeitgeist might make it difficult to see an injustice, but that is hardly an excuse. The Zeitgeist does not necessitate andro*-superioristic thinking. We cannot assume that the Zeitgeist does mandate andro*-superiorism. Otherwise, it would not be possible to find a significant number of sources calling to overcome this superiorism

First of all, it is fairly obvious that those who suffered from the andro*-superiorist violence certainly knew – despite any boundaries of the Zeitgeist – that they were inferiorized. This is more than apparent, for instance, in Christine de Pizan, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Mary Astell, Catharine Trotter Cockburn, Mary Wollstonecraft, Émilie du Châtelet, Sojourner Truth, or Harriet Taylor Mill. All of these female* philosophers understood andro*-superiorism as *violent injustice* and made this understanding abundantly clear in their works. They all possessed the necessary knowledge to be aware that andro*-superiorism is injustice, whether they lived in the fourteenth, nineteenth, or any other century and the works by these female* philosophers are available. They have been analyzed in studies of female* philosophers (most importantly in *A History of Women Philosophers*, ed. by Mary Ellen Waithe in four volumes), they have been translated, commented on, and are available in large-scale series.⁶ The “research has recovered the work of a solid core of philosophical women. No longer do we face skepticism from doubters, who queried whether they counted as philosophers” (HUTTON 2020, 30). Philosophers who do not know these women* have no excuse – these philosophers lack either a proper education, historical thoroughness, or any interest in overcoming misogyny*.

⁶ See for instance the series *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr. and *Re-Reading the Canon*, ed. by Nancy Tuana

The Zeitgeist-myth, we would assume, would become even more brittle if it were possible to show that not only female* philosophers knew about its inherent anti-human violence, but also male* philosophers. Can we find anti-andro*superiorist sources written by male* authors? We can indeed, they do exist. One important example is Theodor von Hippel, mayor of Königsberg, friend and student of avid misogyn*ist Immanuel Kant. A central claim of his book *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber* (1792) was “that excluding women from the public sphere is a travesty of justice that prevents the advancement of humanity toward genuine civilization” (as cited in KNELLER 2006, 451). Taking von Hippel’s ideas into account, the misgogyn*y of an Immanuel Kant can no longer be protected by the idea of a Zeitgeist.

Finally, we wish to point out – again using Kant as an example –, that the myth of the Zeitgeist underestimates the philosophical capabilities of the canonical philosophers in the strangest way. Kant expressly understood his philosophy as a revolution, as a turning point. It was widespread up until Kant’s transcendental philosophy to assume that objects determined their perception and not the other way around. We thus have to question whether it is truly too much to ask of a philosopher such as Kant, who was able to revolutionize the epistemological principles of Western philosophy, to understand that he had succumbed to an utterly baseless andro*-superiorism?

The Second Myth: Irrelevancy

Once the myth of the Zeitgeist is invalidated the myth of irrelevancy is often the next line of defense. *The Myth of Irrelevancy* teaches us that there is no need to be worried about andro*-superiorism, since it is philosophically irrelevant, it could be completely erased from the canonical philosophers’ works and their philosophies would remain exactly the same. Again, the existence of andro*-superiorism is admitted. However, in the precise moment that the andro*-superiorism is identified, nothing of philosophical relevance appears to remain. The relevance of the canonical philosophers’ every word apparently ceases to exist should those words be found to be andro*-superiorist. The strangest coincidence of andro*superiorism and philosophical irrelevancy protects the canonical philosophers, and the administrators of their philosophical legacy are protected from the need for a critical revision. It is difficult to take this argument

seriously. Can the declaration of a significant portion of humanity as being irrelevant for philosophy be in itself philosophically irrelevant? The research literature shows great care taken to properly understand Hume's thoughts on causality, Kant's Transcendental Deduction, or Fichte's determination of the ego. The smallest details matter whenever the *relevant* philosophy is to be found. Andro*-superiorist passages on the other hand, *because* they are andro*-superiorist, suddenly seem to be *irrelevant*. This is strangely contradictory to the misogyny*ist mythology so far, since this means identifying passages as relevant or irrelevant based upon contemporary ideas, which is exactly what the myth of the Zeitgeist advised us not to do. It might certainly be possible to declare particular passages of the works of Western canonical philosophers to be irrelevant, but this can only be the result of research and never its premise.

What is to Be Done?

The exclusion of women* from the history of philosophy not only violates women*, but also massively harms philosophy in general. The self-aggrandizing male* philosophers who exclude female* philosophers violently marginalize a highly diverse part of humanity which is only defined by being non-male*, by lacking male*ness, by being not like those who arbitrarily declared themselves to matter the most, by not being like the one, but by being the other, by being one of those human beings who were arbitrarily declared to matter the least.

Philosophers – knowingly or unknowingly – following in the steps of the andro*-superiorist biacracy are doomed, or more precisely, they doom themselves to pass on to the next generations an anti-philosophical epistemicidal elitism, an elitism that rejects philosophical thoughts because of the female*ness of those human beings who thought those very thoughts. It will pass on the practice of simply positing the irrelevancy of the thought of particular human beings because these human beings are *not* (in the understanding of the superiorists) male* human beings – without ever providing any proof for any relevancy of this criterion.

Contemporary research conducted by (primarily) female* philosophers working on these issues moves from the “deconstructive analysis of misogyny in the history of philosophy to a reconstruction of the history of philosophy to include women

philosophers as a crucial method of writing the history of philosophy (HAGENGRUBER 2020). It is deeply disturbing that this work was and is left nearly without exception to female* philosophers. This continues the violent tradition. It seems that andro*-superiorists understand philosophy as being in no need of a revision and they present themselves as not being in need of revising their personal philosophical self-understanding. The problem of male* superiorism is made to look like a problem of those who have suffered and who are suffering from it, when it is in fact a problem produced by those who perpetrated the violence. It is certainly necessary that the inclusive (not additive) re-appropriation of philosophy for female* philosophers is supervised by female* philosophers. However, a change of mind has to occur on the side of the perpetrator of the anti-female* violence as well. This work has not yet been done, in fact, as it seems, it has not even been properly started: andro*-superiorism is and continues to be one of the most impactful and most destructive forms of superiorism in (academic) philosophy. Male* philosophers have dehumanized philosophy on the one hand by dehumanizing female* philosophers – and this is being undone by female* researchers. On the other hand, male* philosophers have dehumanized philosophy by superhumanizing themselves. A desuperhumanization of male* philosophers by male* philosophers, a moral revolution that understands male* superiorism as anti-philosophical violence, has not yet occurred: male* philosophers still commit the superhumanist fallacy. A proper recovery from andro*-superiorism would be a two-fold undertaking.

Adsereditio

One component of this undertaking can be called *adsereditio* – derived from the Latin expression, *reditio ad se*, to come back to oneself (see FRETTER 2022). It is not our place to prescribe what is best for female* human beings. Certainly, female* human beings having suffered and suffering from andro*-superiorism to *adseredate* – in whatever form that may take place. They certainly need to come back to themselves. Andro*-superiorist violence has forced female* human beings away from themselves, preventing them from forming and practicing their will. To deny someone that which is their most intimate own is at the heart of andro*-superiorist violence. After the *dehumanization* by anti-female* violence, female* human beings

need to rehumanize themselves. Those violated by andro*-superiorism need to *adseredate*. This is usually willingly conceded. And, as previously mentioned, it is usually left to female* philosophers to deal with the damage done to philosophy by andro*-superiorism.

Desuperiorization

Something is apparently missing though. Tragically, to overcome andro*-superiorism, all the explicit advocates and the silent accomplices need to rehumanize themselves as well - a *rehumanization* of the male* philosophers is also necessary, alas not because of an antecedent dehumanization, but because of an antecedent *narcissistic excess of self-superhumanization*: andro*-superiorist philosophers need to *desuperiorize* themselves (see FRETER 2021, FRETER 2020). Andro*-superiorist violence must not only be overcome by those who suffered from it, but also by those who committed it. Andro*-superiorists have to delegitimize themselves (or rather understand that they have never been legitimized) in order to overcome their self-aggrandizing self-determination as superhuman beings. If this desuperiorization does not take place, there is good reason to fear that in the logical second in which the female* counterforce is – for whatever reason – no longer able to continue to push back andro*-superiorist violence, andro*-superiorist human beings will mercilessly steal again what they have never owned and what was rightfully taken away from them for a brief moment of justice.

We have proposed understanding superiorism as incapability, an unwillingness to accept otherness *sui generis* and to take the other as the other seriously. *Desuperiorization* is accordingly to be understood as the philosophical practice that allows us, at times even necessitates us, to develop the capability and willingness to accept otherness *sui generis*, to become capable, able, and willing to take the other as the other seriously. *Desuperiorization* is to consciously, intentionally and practically unwant one's own (alleged) superiority. We would like to conclude our contribution with an explanation, initially rather abstract, of what is meant by this (it is left to a follow-up work to fully develop a practical example).

To desuperiorize a philosophical thought – in the context of this study⁷
– means practically:

(a) to investigate whether a thought (an idea, a philosophy etc.) commits the superhuman fallacy.

We need to find out whether a philosophical thought (for instance, the Aristotelian idea of friendship, Augustine's idea of free will, Descartes' idea of science, Kant's idea of the categorical imperative or Habermas' idea of society) in whatever form implies that there is a normatively relevant difference between human beings – in the case of this study between male* and female* human beings. Should this be the case, then we have a good reason to believe that we have found a superiorist thought. Now, we need:

(b) to investigate whether this thought necessarily depends on the superhuman fallacy.

We need to find out whether the thought in question can only be thought when the superhuman fallacy is committed or whether it is possible to replace the ideas of superhumanity and subhumanity with the idea of humanity – humanity in a most serious and sincere sense. Subsequently, we need:

(c) to investigate what happens to this thought when humanity replaces the idea of superhumanity and subhumanity.

We need to figure out what sense a thought makes after we have removed the fallacy. Is there anything left of the initial thought or is it substantially superiorist? Do we have to give up on this thought because it vanished with the removal of the superhuman fallacy? Or can we continue a tradition of this thought after its desuperiorization? It is important to note that desuperiorization does *not* aim for the destruction of the Western philosophical canon, but only to neutralize its superiorisms. It is yet to be determined what will be left of philosophy as we know it today. We do not, we cannot know this now.

⁷ It will be slightly different in contexts where the Other is not a human being but, for instance, a non-human animal, a landscape, or something else.

We – and this ‘we’ includes anyone who feels addressed – do, however, know that we cannot ever make the claim to philosophize properly should we lack the courage to face the bitter reality that our Western philosophical heritage as we find it today might be rooted in superiorisms such as andro*-superiorism. We might find that we can save all philosophical thought, we might find that hardly anything needs to be desuperiorized – although this would be quite surprising. But as long as we have not philosophically investigated and desuperiorized our superiorist philosophical traditions, *we cannot know whether their superiorisms still affect us or not*⁸, and thus *we cannot know whether we continue to commit acts of violence or not*. Who would dare to live with this uncertainty?

Philosophy of Humankind

Philosophy, as we find it today, is to a significant degree *the result of violence*. We find ideas to be relevant not primarily or solely because they are philosophically sound. The will to and execution of violence significantly contributed to making them relevant while silencing any philosophical challenges to these very ideas. Western philosophy as we can find it today is *not* the result of all human beings philosophizing together, but rather of a self-aggrandized elite violently dominating the human endeavor of philosophy. Those who suffered this violence have understood what is to be done. Not enough of those who have committed and continue to commit andro*superiorist violence – and it will be up to the reader’s discretion to determine whether they have done and continue to do so or not – have understood their part. There are no more excuses. We – and again, this ‘we’ includes anyone who feels addressed – need to desuperiorize ourselves and make philosophy – finally – an endeavour of all of humankind.

⁸ A philosopher can certainly decide to do so, a philosopher can decide to intentionally be a superiorist. Whoever chooses to do so may do so, but it would be advisable for this philosopher to give up any denial of their superiorism and clearly explicate, abstaining from any inclusivist language, who, in their understanding, is superior and who is inferior.

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